



City of Seattle  
Office of the Mayor

## News

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### **Mayor McGinn calls on Village Voice Media to meet to strengthen policies against underage sex trafficking**

*Seattle Police have identified Backpage.com as an "accelerant" of child exploitation*

SEATTLE – Mayor Mike McGinn today called on Village Voice Media to meet with him and the Seattle Police Department to discuss strengthening their policies against underage sex trafficking in their print and online advertisements.

"This is a serious and disturbing issue. We've received a growing number of reports that Backpage.com is being used to exploit children," said Mayor Mike McGinn. "It's just wrong. We're asking them and other sites to meet with us to find ways to protect children from exploitation and help keep our communities safe."

The Seattle Police Department has identified the use of the adult services section of Backpage.com as a contributor to the problem of child exploitation. Specifically, they are an "accelerant" of underage sex trafficking. The problem exists in both the print and online version of the Backpage.com service.

"In 2011 alone, Seattle Police Department detectives uncovered four documented cases of child prostitution openly advertised on the Backpage.com website," said Lt. Eric Sano of the Seattle Police Department's Vice/High Risk Victims Unit. "Village Voice Media can take proactive steps to address this problem, and we'd like to sit down with them to help clean up their ads."

Underage sex trafficking is a growing problem in Seattle and around the country. A 2008 report from the City of Seattle's Human Services Department estimated 300-500 children under the age of 18 are being exploited for commercial sex in Seattle and King County. Children as young as twelve have been exploited and runaways are particularly vulnerable. The report noted that the internet has been increasingly used for sexual exploitation.

Over the past several years the City of Seattle has worked to raise public awareness and dedicated significant resources to the issue. In 2010, working with partners, Seattle

Police rescued 81 children from commercial sexual exploitation. The City's Human Services Department also manages the Bridge Program, which helps provide recovery treatment to children rescued from commercial sexual exploitation. It provides six beds in a home-like setting and comprehensive wraparound services for an estimated 20 young people, between the ages of 14 and 17, per year.

"Chief John Diaz and I are committed to public safety in partnership with the police and the community," said Mayor Mike McGinn. "So I am asking Village Voice to work with us to reduce the commercial sexual exploitation of minors."

View the mayor's letter to Village Voice Media: <http://mayormcginn.seattle.gov/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/709-Mayor-McGinn-letter-to-Jim-Larkin-CEO-Village-Voice-Media-LLC-01JUL2011-T-MM.pdf>

Chief John Diaz' memorandum regarding Backpages.com:  
<http://mayormcginn.seattle.gov/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/20110701114017057.pdf>

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